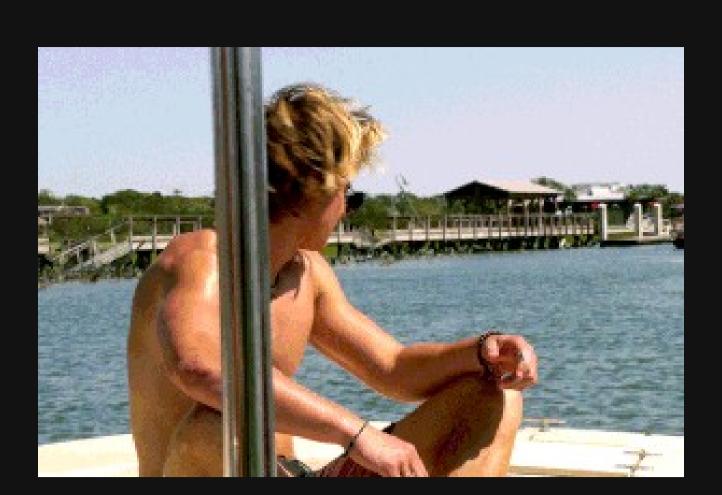
Chapter Eighteen



I woke up the next morning with a blanket I definitely did not have the night before thrown over me. The light from the rising sun was turning the sky a pale blue, and I snuggled deeper into the blanket, noticing it was the one from the pull out bed.

I sat up and did a quick stretch with my arms over my head and pulled the blanket around my shoulders. I got out of the hammock and made my way inside. I tried to keep the door from squeaking to be as quiet as possible, trying not to wake a sleeping Pope on the couch on the porch.

I got into the living room to see JJ curled into a ball with no blanket. I smiled at the sight of his blond hair flopped over his face and his body curled tightly together.

I pulled the blanket from my shoulders before gently throwing it across the blond. He smiled slightly in his sleep before snuggling into the blanket, causing me to wish I had a camera at the ready.

I went to my room, and, in order not to wake Kie who still slept in my bed, quietly changed into a swim suit, some shorts, and a scoop neck tank top before making my way into the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. I pulled my hair into a messy bun before leaving the bathroom, bumping into someone on my way out.

I gasped, not expecting anyone to be awake yet.

"Jesus, JJ. You scared me." I whispered, causing him to smirk.

He had one arm leaning on the doorframe and the other at his side.

"Uh, you gonna let me out, or just keep me in the bathroom all day?" I joked, growing slightly uncomfortable at how quiet he was being.

When JJ was quiet, nothing good was about to happen.

He looked me up and down, causing my cheeks to heat up slightly. It's not the first time he's done it, but it's the first time he's done it so obviously and just us.

He suddenly leaned down and pressed a kiss to my cheek.

"Thanks for the blanket, sweetheart."

My heart stopped for a moment in my chest as he whispered in my ear, and it began to pound as he kept his face close to mine, his eyes meeting mine only to jump down lower before meeting them again.

I bit the inside of my lip as my eyes did the same, sweeping down to his lips for a moment before meeting his blue ones.

No Pogue on Pogue macking. No Pogue on Pogue macking.

I chanted the rule in my head over and over as our stare o seemed to stretch on for minutes.

He suddenly straightened up and turned around, stopping to bang on the door to my room.

"Wake up, Kie. We got shit to do!"

I stayed frozen in the doorway to the bathroom, trying to process what the hell just happened.

"What the fuck?" I whispered to myself as I heard JJ start to yell at Pope to wake up.

Kiara came out of my room, hair all over the place, and headed my way.

"Are you gonna stand in the bathroom all day, or let a girl pee?"

I shook my head before laughing at my friend and moving out of the way.

"Yeah, sorry."

"You okay?"

I meet my friends brown eyes, seeing the concern in them, and I nodded.

"Yeah. I think I'm okay."

A er we packed a cooler, keeping just some sodas and waters in there due to the later 'mission,' as Pope kept calling it, we all got in the HMS Pogueand took o . I sat myself on the bow of the boat, my favorite spot, while John B sat at the helm, Kiara sat on the port side, Pope stood next to my brother, and JJ made his way from the stern to sit next to me.

I sat facing the water, letting the breeze blow my loose hairs away from my face and the sun warm my back, and JJ sat facing our friends, with his legs to the side and one bent up to rest his arm on. Our shoulders would brush together every time the boat swayed, and I couldn't help to cast my eyes sideways every once in a while to watch JJ's hair fly around in the wind. Of course, it had nothing to do with the fact that he was shirtless. Nothing at all.

JJ suddenly turned to face me and crossed his legs, letting out a low whistle.

"You guys see that?"

I looked to see what he was talking about and saw another boat heading the opposite way in the channel.

"That's the Malibu 24-MXZ. The world's finest wakesetter. Number one in luxury, quality, and performance. Two-hundred K, easy."

"Did you memorize that all by yourself, JJ?" I chucked, causing him to push me by my shoulder.

"We picked the wrong parents," Pope said, causing me to roll my eyes.

"I hate to break it to you guys, but that's Topper and his girlfriend."

I li ed my sunglasses o my face to get a better look, and sure enough, there was Topper in his frosted tip glory with a noticeable bruise on his jaw, and Sarah standing by his side.

As their boat began to pass ours, I sat up from leaning back on my hands, got onto my knees, using a hand on JJ's bare shoulder to keep myself stable as the boat rocked slightly from their wake.

"You don't have to act like you don't see us, bitch," Kie said, only loud enough for us to hear.

I took a di erent approach and help up my middle finger.

"Fuck you, Topper!"

JJ pulled my hand down, and Pope told me to shut up as Topper turned around at my yell. I put my other hand on JJ's other shoulder and got to my feet, bracing my knees against his back for balance.

I cupped both hands around my mouth as they moved further away from us.

"I hope the whole island knows you got your face beat by a girl!"

JJ turned and wrapped his arms around my legs, laughing into my bare stomach as he tried to seriously tell my to stop. Kiara was laughing her ass o , and John B and Pope were both shaking their heads at my antics. I took a deep breath for slapping JJ's hands away and sitting back down.

"I feel much better now."

That caused the rest of my friends to laugh.

A er spending the morning fishing, swimming, sunning, listening to music, and just hanging out, Pope announced that we should head to the hotel to look at the coordinates.

I sighed, disappointed. I loved spending days on the water with my friends. It was easy to forget about the DCS, my dad, and the Kooks when it was nothing but the water and four of my favorite people.

On the way back to the Chateau, JJ threw one of our caught fish at my feet, causing me to squeal. I didn't mind catching the fish, but I did not like touching them a er that.

He laughed before picking it up and returning it to its spot in the bucket.

Once we all got changed, we piled into the van. I drove us to the hotel with JJ riding copilot. I pulled into a parking spot up front.

"Alright, keep a look out. We're behind enemy lines," JJ joked, grabbing the gun out of his backpack and making a show of checking the clip inside of it.

"Yo, come on, man. Just put it back," John B said getting out of the

van.

"What, you can never be too careful."

Pope leaned on the door next to JJ.

"Hey, I predict that bring a weapon to a four-star hotel will likely cause more problems than they solve."

"Thank you, Pope," I muttered, causing JJ to turn to me.

"I swear to God, I'm gonna throw that thing in the ocean, JJ. Put it back," Kiara added, sticking her head in between the front seats before climbing out of the van.

When JJ just looked sadly at the gun, I reach out, grabbed it by the front, pulled it out of his hands, and shoved it in the glove box, which I then locked with the keys before giving him a pointed look.

"Dude, you can't grab a gun like that," he pouted before climbing out the car.

I rolled my eyes before getting out a er him, stu ing the keys into my back pocket.

We all followed JJ around towards the employ entrance on the side of the building.

Pope asked what we were doing here, and I pointed to JJ.

"We're getting on the internet because only rich people have electricity right now."

"Bingo."

JJ swiped his badge and held open the door.

"A er you," he said, motioning with his hand for me to enter with a slight bow.

I laughed and entered, then stopped and waited for him to let everyone else in, so we could keep following. We all follow a er him in a single file line as we cut through the kitchen.

"Andrew!" He yelled out, before nodding his head. "What's up, bro?"

We dodge around a waiter before walking by a lady in a chef hat plating something that smelled delicious.

"Mama L, good to see you!" JJ greeted her and tried to sneak something o the plate.

"Hey, no!" The lady said, smacking his hand with her wooden spoon, causing me to laugh.

JJ turned to me with a fake o ended look on his face.

"I like her."

I smirked as he rolled his eyes and led us out of the kitchen.

"See they got the backup generators going? Kooks don't miss a beat," JJ said, slowing down and placing a hand on my back to make me walk next to him.

We walked down a long hallway, and JJ suddenly stopped by two double doors and grabbed my wrist, pulling me inside the room with him. Thank God it was empty.

"Sweet Lord, the internet!" Pope exclaimed, running towards one of the few computers in the room.

JJ held the door open for everyone else but kept my wrist in his grip.

Weird.

He shut the door and walked us towards the computers.

"Let me get in there. Gotta check out my Insta models," he said, sending a wink down to me.

I rolled my eyes and pulled my wrist from his grip.

"We don't have time for that," Kiara said, and I stood behind the chair she was sitting in, placing my hands on the back of it.

JJ bumped his shoulder into mine as John B pulled out the map.

"Coordinates, please?" Pope asks, placing his hands on the keyboard.

"Thirty-four, fi y-seven, thirty north. Seventy-five, fi y-five, forty-two west."

I began drumming my fingers nervously on the back of Kie's chair.

The globe on the computer rotated and zoomed in on the Outer Banks, and a red pin plopped down just o the Continental Shelf.

"Boom, Continental Shelf right there."

"Well, if it's o the deep end, it's not gonna be much of a treasure hunt, is it?" Pope asked, annoyed.

"Well, let's zoom in and find out," I said, the anticipation killing me.

Pope starts zooming in, and numbers representing water depth start appearing.

"Come on, baby," JJ muttered, placing a hand on my lower back.

I don't know why JJ was being so touchy. Not that I didn't enjoy the

attention or the a ection from it, but it was just... abnormal for him.

Knowing JJ's home life, it didn't really surprise me to figure out JJ wasn't a touchy-feely person. So, the recent lingering touches, the brushing of shoulders, hugs, cuddles, and cheek kisses initiated by him were throwing me o.

The computer zoomed in on where the pin was.

"Shit, it's on the high side. It's only nine-hundred feet."

"Only nine-hundred feet," I mocked, making a face at Kiara who nodded in agreement.

"Is that doable or something?"

"Yeah, totally doable," JJ answered, shrugging his shoulder and dropping his hand from my back as everyone turned to him.

"Okay, will we be taking your personal submarine?" Pope asks, causing me to send JJ a pointed look.

"How do you know this, Mr. Dive Master?" My brother asked, obviously as confused and doubtful as the rest of us.

"The salvage yard."

There was a pause.

"Okay, I'll ask. How they hell is the salvage yard going to help us?" I asked.

"They got a drone that can drop a thousand. It has a three-sixty camera and everything. It's for, like, deep dives and stu . It's exactly what we need."

"And can your dad get his grimy little hands on that?"

"Well, my dad's grimy little hands got his ass fired. I guess the salvage captain frowns on showing up shitfaced, turns out."

I placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, and he turned to give me a grateful smile.

"But the drone's there. It's in the impound yard out back."

"How much did you say was on the Royal Merchant again?" Kiara asked, causing me to smirk.

"Four hundred million, baby."

Pope got up from the computer and blocked the doors.

"Four hundred million dollars," Kiara emphasized before getting out of her chair and pushing Pope out of the way of the doors.

"No. Absolutely not!"

"Pope! Move!"

JJ followed her, and I cleared the computer's search history before shutting it completely down as John B shoved the map in his backpack.

"Can't we do anything legal for money?"

I laughed and grabbed Pope by the front of his shirt and dragged him out a er me.

"Stop whining, Bubba."

Continue reading next part 🗆